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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF DISTINGUISHED PERSONS.

An account of the Rev. George Walker, late professor of Theology at the New College, and President of the Philosophical and Literary Society, Manchester, extracted from a memorial of his life, written by his son.

GEORGE WALKER was born about the year 1735, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Though his father's circumstances must have sensibly felt the expenses of a numerous family, yet at no period does this appear to have operated to our author's prejudice, by depriving him of any of those advantages necessary to qualify him for the exercise of a profession, to which he appears to have been early destined. He received the rudiments of his education at the grammar-school of Newcastle, then under the care of the Rev. Dr. Moises, a clergyman of the church of England, but a man of great liberality of sentiment, and who had deservedly acquired a very high reputation for the rapid progress of his scholars.

In this situation he gave early indications of a distinguished character. Before he had attained the age of five, he had made so considerable a proficiency in the Latin language, that he was deemed fully competent to enter upon Cæsar's commentaries. This rapidity of attainment, the consequence of a superior capacity united to a more than ordinary share of application, was not accompanied, as is usually the case, with that gravity of temper and conduct, that seems to forbid a participation in the sports and exercises congenial to the period of youth: on the contrary, he possessed all the characteristic cheerfulness of a boy, and entered with more than common ardour into the juvenile amusements of his school fellows. For his rapid progress in school learning he was no doubt greatly indebted to the judicious care and attention of his master, who appears early to have distinguished him from the rest of his pupils, and to have bestowed upon him a more than ordinary share of attention.

Under the care of this excellent

man he continued till the age of ten, when he was sent to Durham, in order to be placed under the immediate direction of his uncle, the Rev. Thomas Walker, minister of the dissenting congregation at that place, a gentleman of considerable eminence in his profession, but who, from the freedom of his speculative opinions, seems to have been considered by some of his contemporary ministers as entertaining unsound and heterodox tenets. The presbyterians had not yet altogether emancipated themselves from the errors and religious prejudices, which in former times had so strongly marked the character of their sect; and many of those controverted points, the truth of which cannot be clearly established upon any express revelation of scripture, but which had been formerly considered as essential articles of faith, were still in some measure regarded as the necessary terms of admission to a ministerial communion. That simple and rational conception of christianity, which admits of nothing as essential to the office of a christian minister, but a belief in its divine origin, and a practical adherence to its precepts, and which regards all other disputed doctrines as the speculations of fallible men, as mere human inventions altogether foreign to its genuine meaning and simplicity, had not yet superseded the use of those particular creeds and confessions of faith, which were deemed to contain whatever was sound and orthodox in christian belief. From the influence of these contracted notions of religion he was happily freed in having his education intrusted to the care of his uncle, who impressed no bias on his mind in favour of any particular tenets but left it wholly free to adopt those opinions which should be the result of a rational, manly, and impartial inquiry.

In this situation he was particularly fortunate; for, independently of the advantage that he derived from the constant superintendence of his uncle, he was regularly sent to the grammar-school of that town, then in the highest celebrity as a place of classical edu-

cation. Mr. Dongworth, the head master of this seminary, was a person of extraordinary endowments, and possessed of every natural and acquired talent, that could conciliate affection, or command respect. Though exacting at all times the greatest deference to his authority, yet his system was rather to conciliate by a kind and liberal treatment, than to awe into submission by the terrors of magisterial severity. But the highest panegyric that can be passed upon his character is the universal esteem and veneration in which he was held by his scholars. No time could efface from the mind of Mr. Walker a sense of his numerous excellencies, and to the latest period of his life he uniformly dwelt upon his memory with the fondest recollection; and with a warmth of attachment, that bordered upon enthusiasm, he has often declared, that he anticipated with pleasure the time, when he should again be re-united with him in another world. The influence of a man thus loved and honoured must have operated with the most beneficial effect upon the minds of his pupils. At a period of life the most prone to imitation, before usurping prejudices and inveterate habits have yet established their dominion, there is a natural propensity to the prevailing sentiments and manners of those with whom we associate; and particularly where we are taught to look up to them as our instructors, and the objects of our imitation. The benefit which society derives, therefore, from the exertions of an individual thus qualified for the arduous task of education, is altogether incalculable; for the influence which is thus early obtained over youth is never, perhaps, wholly obliterated; in some measure therefore he may be regarded as the parent of their minds, as the modeller of their future lives.

There is a curious epistle, which he wrote to his father shortly after his arrival at Durham, complaining of a want of constancy in his pursuits, and how much his attention to his school duties had been diverted by that propensity to novelty, so natural to the ardour of youthful minds. This, like all the rest of his early productions, bears the strongest marks of a

vigorous and active mind, and evinces a maturity of capacity and judgment, that might almost enable him to rank with those literary phenomena, whose precocity of intellect and attainments have excited so much curiosity and astonishment.

"You will no doubt," says he, "be sufficiently satisfied of the natural inconstancy of your son, and how impossible it is for him ever to continue steadfast to any one employment, when you see how like a rebel I have shook off the yoke of Hogarth and other celebrated painters, after it had begun to grow tolerably easy to me, and willingly entered into the service of the muses, a service which preys upon my thoughts night and day, without intermission. The only satisfaction I can propose to myself, is, that you above all won't be angry with me, nay, that you will even be pleased at my servitude, and beg my mistress to lord it over me with more imperious sway. I beg, father, that you would accept kindly the first fruits of a genius yet unripe, and which perhaps may promise something better when at maturity. The letter enclosed I wrote on purpose to show the natural wavering of my mind, for which I have been often upbraided by Mr. A."

The enclosed letter, to which he alludes, was a poetical epistle to his father, in which, after enumerating the variety of objects that had occupied his attention at different times, he observes that the muses, willing to augment the number of their votaries, had at length retained him in their service, and had bound him fast with a chain, which it was his pleasure to wear. This epistle appears to be the first fruits of his devotion at their shrine; and though they had not yet bestowed upon him any very sublime portion of their inspiration, yet he courted their aid with such assiduous zeal, as to merit from them a more grateful return.

Though he seems to have presumed upon his father's approbation of this his last pursuit, yet it is certain, that it was regarded by some of his friends as no very favourable symptom of his future attainments. Mr. A. the gentleman to whom he alludes in the last letter as having upbraided him for his

sickleness, in a letter to his father about the beginning of 1748, speaks of him in the following terms :

"George has this day entered at the writing school, and wants nothing but application, to do well there, or at any other school, I am spurring him up every day ; so that I believe he looks upon me as his continual tormentor. His greatest unhappiness is, that he is fond of every new thing, and as soon weary of it. Were it possible to bring him off this temper, and to fix him at any study, which would be to his advantage, I should not doubt his proficiency : I wish when you write you would talk to him pretty warmly on this head ; for this is his failing, and it must be corrected in time, if ever he make any progress in any point of learning ; otherwise, he will have a smattering in every thing, and in reality know nothing. I must own I cannot but respect him on account of his parts, and could wish to see him make a proper use of them. I am sensible that all his faults are owing to his natural temper, which has too much of spirit and vivacity in it. I therefore believe, that harsh usage would not do with him, as it might break his spirits, and make him indifferent about every thing : the best way would be, to recommend to him for his own interest to leave off painting, poetry, and nonsense, which will never make him a halfpenny richer or wiser, and to apply himself to his school learning ; and when he has any vacant time, let him employ it in reading history, or any other useful book, which may be of service to him afterward. Were you to do this yourself, it would have a greater impression upon him, than any thing I could say. I should not have said so much, but that I find you intend to breed him a scholar."

What impression these fears made upon his father is uncertain. He continued to indulge his passion for poetry, though not with so much hindrance to his school duties as is here supposed ; on the contrary, in a letter to his father in December 1748, a very flattering testimony to his proficiency is borne him by his uncle, who thus expresses himself :

"I should be glad to know what your resolution is about George. As he has made such progress in school learning, I hope you design to complete him as a scholar. Indeed it would be throwing away all the money you have laid out upon him not to do it. He is a boy of a very promising genius and fine parts ; and as a few years more at his books would fit him for public usefulness, I would have you by all means put him forward. It will not only be doing him justice, but it will be your easiest way of providing for him in the world. If he has his health, and his application is in any degree answerable to his parts, I make no doubt but he will one day shine in a bookish profession ; but in any other way of life (his particular turn of mind considered) there is very little reason to think he will make any figure at all. I have a great desire, I confess, that George should apply himself to the study of divinity ; in which way it may possibly be in my power, if God shall continue my life, to be assisting to him more ways than one."

It was at this period, that his destination for the ministry was finally decided. In consequence of this, and of his uncle's removal to Leeds, having been chosen pastor of the Mill hill meeting house of that town, it was thought adviseable, previous to his studying at one of the Scotch universities, to remove him for some time to a dissenting academy at Kendal, under the care of Dr. Kotherham. He was accordingly sent thither at the latter end of the year 1749. In this situation he still continued to indulge his taste for poetry : it was here that he composed the greater part of his imitations of Anacreon ; they are specimens of the proficiency which he had made in an art, to which in his early youth he was so much devoted, and of the excellence to which in all probability he would have attained, if he had continued to indulge his imagination at the expense of the more serious and profound studies, in which he was afterwards engaged.

If we may judge from a catalogue of the books that he took with him to Kendal, among which were two

editions of Euclid, Gravesandes Institutions, Sherwin's Tables, &c. he must already have entered upon the study of the mathematics. It is however certain, that during his residence here, he pursued it with great vigour. His ardour indeed in the prosecution of his studies was so great, as to occasion considerable uneasiness to his friends, lest his health should fall a sacrifice, and induced them to remonstrate with him upon the necessity of remitting in some measure the severity of his application. The effect of these admonitions was but temporary, for he appears soon after to have brought on a severe fit of illness by his excessive and unremitted attention to his books.

In 1751 he left Kendal,* and removed the same year to Edinburgh. Among other recommendatory letters he had one from his uncle, to principal Wishart, which was of considerable service to him, as it introduced him to the particular notice of that gentleman, who was pleased to honour him during the whole of his residence there with many personal attentions. He enjoyed also the advantage of

pursuing his mathematical studies under the tuition of the celebrated Matthew Stewart. As hitherto probably his reading upon these subjects

Pleased with the view of your quadrant, I have made one of copper, about seventeen inches radius, which is long enough to admit of a degree of the quadrant to be divided into eight parts, though I have yet divided it only into four. To prove the exactness of it, I measured a window; when my observation wanted not three inches of the truth in twenty five feet. Not content with simply using it for taking altitudes, I fixed to it a piece of copper moveable on the centre, with two sights upon it, and two also on the one side of the quadrant, by which means I can apply it to surveying, where the angles don't exceed ninety degrees. This use of it is indeed amusing, and yields an agreeable satisfaction, to be thus enabled to measure inaccessible heights and distances; yet easy as it is, I knew nothing of it till you first pointed it out to me &c."

Mr. Walker was always much devoted to the practice of the mechanic arts; and the manual occupations of the leather and the chisel continued during the greatest part of his life to furnish an agreeable occupation to his leisure hours. In this, as in every thing to which he applied himself, he exhibited proofs of uncommon excellence: his work was much admired for its truth and accuracy; his filing was so remarkable that in point of flatness it was equal to grinding, in the technical language of the trade it was what is expressed by filing hollow. He betrayed also considerable powers of invention: he constructed a chuck upon an entire new principle; his ingenuity was also apparent in a very curious machine for drilling holes perfectly perpendicular to the plate, which was but a secondary invention for the purpose of accomplishing his plan of wheels and pinions with loose rollers to avoid friction, a principle which he afterwards applied to a clock that he constructed with his own hands. In the latter part of his life he had also invented a very curious machine for drawing all the concave sections, which, though he did not live to finish it, yet showed the highest degree of inventive mechanical genius, in combination with his mathematical powers.

It may not be improper to notice also the excellence of his drawing, as an additional proof of the versatility of his talent. He had early in life been at very consi-

* From the following extract of a letter written at this time to a fellow student, it is probable that he experienced no very important benefit from his residence here. "I will tell you of a piece of practical knowledge I have lately gained. Our good academical tutor thought it not his duty to instruct me in this or in any other kind of practice, but, as some recompense for the sums he got from us, filled our brains with a deal of fine speculative knowledge, without once showing the several useful and entertaining purposes, to which these particular branches of learning were adapted. We have learnt plane trigonometry, and to measure towers and castles upon white paper, without knowing that a quadrant existed but by name. We have learnt spherical trigonometry, without the convenience of a globe, and with but a faint idea of the situation of the several circles in the various positions of it. We have read philosophy, without being assured that there was a planet in the heavens, unless our faith were much greater than our experience: and lastly we have studied astronomy, without the knowledge of one star in the firmament. But to return from this digression to my subject.

had been chiefly under his own direction, it was fortunate for him, that in the further prosecution of this science he had the assistance of so eminent a master, who was remarked for the purity of his taste, as well as the elegance of his demonstrations founded on the clear and perspicuous style of the ancients. In a letter to his uncle he thus describes the different studies in which he was engaged:

"Morality, criticism, and some of the higher branches of mathematics, are the public classes in which I am engaged. The second is taught by the professor of logic, who gives lectures likewise on Longinus and Aristotle's poetics; and how just and useful his remarks are may easily be judged by the universal applause they meet with, though without any ornaments of dress to set them off. An acquaintance with some of the rules of criticism is certainly, if not absolutely necessary, since it tends immediately to form the taste in reading, and guide the judgment between those two equally injudicious extremes, of ill-naturedly censuring and ridiculously extolling every thing we read, &c."

In another letter to a friend he unbosoms completely upon the subject of his present situation and the state of his mind; after describing the variety of his occupations, he adds, "Do not suppose that I would image myself to you as a laborious student, who naturally feels more delight in reading a battle of Homer, or a crabbed controversy in theology, than when a boy in stinking a quoit or a tennisball. Nature has not been so indulgent to me, as to make what

derable expense and trouble in collecting the engravings of the Italian and other artists; some of the most admired specimens of these he afterwards employed himself in copying for his friends; the extreme accuracy with which they were traced was surprising. There was also a freedom and boldness in his hatches, which preserved all the spirit of the original. It is difficult to speak in adequate terms of the excellence to which he attained in the various objects to which he directed his attention, without appearing to use the language of exaggeration.

is necessary so highly agreeable; for however generous she may have been to me at my birth, either she herself, or habit, or perhaps both, have dashed the present with a mixture of indolence, that has been my darling foible since I first knew a letter, and even in riper years, not even the fear of a rod could closet me with a classical author, when the temptation of play and diversion with companions of my own stamp interfered. Since the period indeed when ambition and pride could have a proper influence upon me, the spirit of emulation, the desire of answering if possible the warm expectations of my friends, and what my own ambition may have imagined, and of sustaining with some tolerable repute the public profession I am designed for, have made me industriously strive to curb this passion, before my character in life could draw its complexion from it; and whether I have succeeded or no, or whether I am deceived, and necessity alone makes me virtuous, I know not; but (vanity apart) I cannot but be pleased to find with how much satisfaction I can spend my time in the pursuit of philosophy natural and moral. To fit I have sacrificed all inferior sciences, as amusements more proper for a settled period of life, than an age when industry and application must lay the ground work for the whole of it. Hogaith I have discarded, indeed it is some time since he has been out of favour. But the muses grumble hard at the little respect I pay them, and perhaps mean never to assist me in any composition for the future. But when I petition them, then may they deny me! For to say the truth, the flights and raptures of a poetical imagination are but luxuriant branches in the composition of a sermon, and rather veil than give a lustre to the good sense which may attend it: for it is not the eloquence of words without a meaning, or the smoothness of the periods, that constitute an orator, but the justness of his arguments, the method of arranging them, the knowledge of mankind, and withal the honesty of his own sentiments, and fixed regard for truth, which is his constant prompter, and

gives life and irresistible spirit to the whole harangue."

In this lively description may be clearly discerned a predominance of those sentiments and feelings, by which his subsequent character and writings were so strongly marked. There is indeed throughout the whole of it a justness of sentiment, and an accuracy of style, that would characterize it as the production of a maturer age. Though his inclinations strongly led him to mathematical pursuits, yet he did not suffer himself to be engrossed by them to the neglect of those particular studies, which were necessary to qualify him for the exercise of his future profession. In consequence of this he soon after determined to sacrifice the advantages, which this situation afforded him, of prosecuting these inquiries, and to remove to Glasgow, where he had better opportunities of cultivating, what he always regarded as his prime object, theology. Accordingly, after having at his own request spent the intervening vacation with his uncle at Leeds, that he might have the further advantage of his assistance, he entered as a student of this university at the latter end of 1752.

The chair of divinity was at that time filled by Dr. Leechman, whose learning and liberality did honour to his situation. His lectures were undebased by any tincture of bigotry or prejudice; there appeared in them no particular attachment to any sect, no espousal of any favourite tenets; it was his primary object to establish the fundamental truths of natural and revealed religion, and thence to deduce such reflections, as were calculated to impress upon the minds of his pupils the excellence and necessity of those doctrines, which they enjoined. It was the custom of Mr. Walker, to commit to short-hand the heads of the lectures during the delivery, and afterward to re-compose them with such additions as his memory served to supply; by which means he was enabled more thoroughly to imbibe the spirit of them, and to fix them in his mind.

Soon after his arrival he was chosen a member of a club, that met alternately at each others lodging for the purpose of literary discussion. Each individual in his turn was obliged to supply the subject of the evening, either by the contribution of an original paper, or a translation of some celebrated passage from the ancients. The discussion which followed the reading of the paper generally occupied two or three hours. Mr. Walker was very sensible of the advantages which he derived from such an institution. The desire of excelling in these literary disputations stimulated the mind to exertion, a spirit of emulation was excited in the compositions which they were required to furnish; and as they generally came prepared for the evening's encounter by a previous consideration of the subject, it frequently happened, that a considerable degree of information was obtained from their free and unreserved communication of sentiments.

The period was now approaching, when he was to relinquish the peaceful studies of an academical life, and adventure upon the busy theatre of the world. The part that he was called upon to sustain was of more difficulty, than what is allotted to the generality of its actors. It required an exemption from those minor blemishes and imperfections, that might have passed unnoticed in subordinate characters, but in him would have impaired those excellencies, that were to enable him to support it with dignity and propriety. He has answered the trial; he has performed the part assigned him; and through every varying scene he has trodden the stage with honour and applause. The curtain has at length dropped on him, and he is seen no more; the approbation or censure of the world can no longer affect him: we may therefore, in conformity with the maxim of an ancient sage, definitely pronounce upon the part that he has performed, we may retrace his path of life, and hold it up to the imitation of those, who are destined to succeed him.

To be Continued.